
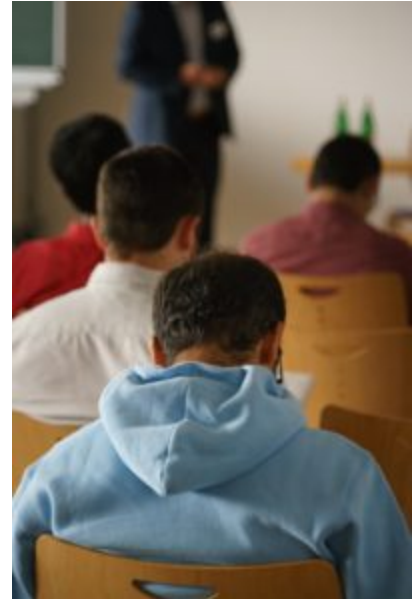


# Paul's View of the Local Church

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## **CHURCH ARTICLE** | *Sean Cavender (fondly remembered)*

As the apostle Paul introduces many of his epistles, he takes the time to praise the congregation for their strengths. Some local congregations had more to be praised for than others did, but usually he could find some good to complement the local church to whom he was writing. The opening of the epistle to the Colossians is no different. Paul first states, “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” (Colossians 1:2). It is easy for us to look over these statements about the local churches that Paul was writing to because they are not addressed to us in the 21st century. However, we can learn several important lessons concerning the local church and how it is to be conducting itself.



First of all, Paul addresses his audience and plainly identifies them as “saints and faithful brethren.” The saints and faithful brethren are the constituents of the local church! The saints of the church are not voted on sometime after they have passed from this life. They are not even people who had performed some great miracle. Saints are members of the Lord’s church who have been forgiven of their sins, cleansed by the blood of Christ (Colossians 1:14; 2:11-13). A saint is a person who has been sanctified and set apart for the purpose of glorifying God in heaven (cf. Colossians 3:2, 3). Paul also identifies the saints as “faithful brethren.” All of the blessings of joy and fellowship that are available to Christians within the context of the local church are dependent upon their faithfulness. Those who complain about a lack of fellowship, love, joy, care, and concern existing within the Lord’s church may need to first consider whether they are being faithful members of the Lord’s church. The blessings we desire will only be found when we are being faithful brethren.

Paul then goes on to identify several factors in the local church that Colosse needed to be praised for. These are all good characteristics that churches need to desire.

### **The Foundation of the Church**

The foundation of every local church must be faith in the Lord and Savior who purchased the church with His own blood, “Since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus...” (Colossians

1:4). Faith in Jesus as the Son of God must be acknowledged by those who would be members of the Lord's body. This was the great truth that Peter acknowledged, and Jesus promised to make it the foundation of His church (Matthew 16:16-18). Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

As elementary as this may seem, we must make sure that we are beginning with the proper foundation. We cannot have an improper foundation and expect to build the church of Jesus Christ. We cannot follow after the teachings of men and expect to build the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:12-13). We cannot follow after Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Alexander Campbell, etc. Our faith must be in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

### **The Motivation of the Church**

Paul then recognizes that the church in Colosse is filled with brotherly love. He wrote, "...and of the love which ye have to all the saints," (Colossians 1:4). The driving motivation of the Lord's church needs to be brotherly love! This is what the church in Corinth lacked (cf. 1 Corinthians 13). When there is no love for our brethren it will lead to division, cliques, embitterment, and strife (cf. Galatians 5:14, 15).

Love is not going to excuse or ignore wrongdoing. However, someone else's sin is not a reason for us to abandon love. Love must be present even when we preach the truth (Ephesians 4:15). Love is what ought to motivate a church to be like Christ (Ephesians 5:2). Love and compassion will unite the body of Christ (Colossians 3:12-15).

### **The Goal of the Church**

The one, clear and obvious goal of every local church should be to go to heaven. Paul recognized the common desire and expectation of the church, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven..." (Colossians 1:5). As Christians who are working and striving through this life, the one thing we all can help each other do is to be with the Savior and Father in heaven for all of eternity.

Far too many times we think of the hope of heaven as something that we may be able to obtain if we are only lucky. We think of it in terms of luck, rather than confidence. Hope is not luck or wishful thinking; hope is a confidence and an assurance that we can have!

Look at how Paul uses the term "hope" in other places, such as in Philippians 1:20. He spoke of the work of preaching the truth of the gospel as an "earnest expectation," "hope," and "boldness." His desire was to ultimately glorify Christ through preaching, or being faithful to the point of death.

Do you talk about hope in the same terms that Paul used? Do we speak of our "earnest expectation" to be with Christ for eternity? Do we consider ourselves to have boldness in regard to where we will make our eternal home? This is what the word "hope" means. We don't need to think of what the word "hope" means. We don't need to think of hope as mere luck or wishful thinking; we need to think of it as something that is our expectation!

## **The Growth of the Church**

Each local church needs to make its spiritual growth a point of emphasis. This is what Paul desired for the church at Colosse, "...and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," (Colossians 1:9). The church at Colosse was in danger of being influenced by false teachers. Paul encouraged these brethren to remain rooted in Christ, built up in the faith, and established (Colossians 2:7, 8). He also warned of the false humility of false teachers (Colossians 2:18). Paul was concerned for the well-being of this church.

The way to battle and overcome false teachers is through knowledge of the truth and the will of God! The church must make spiritual growth a priority for its own well-being. Local churches are not to be influenced by false teachers, being carried away by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). And if you want to see the spiritual immaturity of a local church, just look at how they live their lives. When we learn the truth and grow up in Christ, then we are to put off that old man of sin (Ephesians 4:21, 22). Yet, those who are spiritually immature will allow that old man of sin to linger around and have an influence on their lives. Spiritual growth must be an important part of the local church. Spiritual wisdom is essential in battling false teachers and in overcoming sin.

## **Conclusion**

Paul's view of the local church ought to be what is implemented in each and every local church. The church at Colosse serves as a prime example for us to follow. A church that is built upon Christ, established in love, expecting to receive heaven as their eternal home, and that is filled with knowledge and spiritual wisdom is a church that we ought to be in. The local church is sufficient in helping us live faithfully while offering us encouragement, love, and opportunities for growth.

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